DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 029 CE 049 404

AUTHOR Hillison, John
TITLE The Lessons for Contemporary Vocational Educators from the New Harmony Utopian Society.
PUB DATE Dec 87
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Convention (Las Vegas, NV, December 6-10, 1987).
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational History; *Educational Principles; Experiential Learning; Foundations of Education; Secondary Education; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *New Harmony Utopian Society

ABSTRACT

The New Harmony Utopian Society established in southwestern Indiana in 1815 set many precedents from a social and educational perspective. None were more dramatic nor more significant than its contribution to the field of vocational education. The criteria established by its founders for the New Harmony educational system included a practical perspective, Pestalozzian influence, public support, and as much self-sufficiency as possible. Emphasis on natural learning and hands-on experience gradually evolved into what would today be called vocational education. Economic necessity also made it logical for the New Harmony schools to turn to vocational education. New Harmony lacked skilled workers, and schools could possibly become economically self-supporting. New Harmony followed the social progressiveness of its founders, a stand that was too extreme for the 1820s and that proved to be short-lived. However, important precedent-setting ground was broken. By establishing a practical, school-based alternative to the apprenticeship program, New Harmony helped to legitimize vocational education. New Harmony had additional implications for three major contemporary issues in the field of vocational education, namely sex equity, the comprehensive high school versus vocational school, and teaching academic subjects through vocational education. (YLB)

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The Lessons for Contemporary Vocational Educators from the New Harmony Utopian Society

John Hillison
Vocational-Technical Division
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA 24061

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The Lessons for Contemporary Vocational Education from the New Harmony Utopian Society

The purpose of this historical study was to examine the first publicly supported vocational education program in the United States. This purpose was accomplished by describing the background of the setting for the program at New Harmony; reviewing the influential citizens of New Harmony, especially its owners and educational leaders; describing its educational system; describing its school organization; and examining its vocational education program. For purposes of this study, publicly supported vocational education is defined as education occurring at no cost to the student or the student's parents, occurring at a level between early childhood and adulthood, having content for across-the-boards service areas, emphasizing practical training with hands on learning experiences, and having job entry in a specific occupation as an objective. The study will conclude with comments on the accomplishments of New Harmony and draw implications for contemporary vocational education.

Specific Objectives

Specific objectives accomplished by the study were:

1. To document the developmental background of the New Harmony Utopian Society.
2. To describe the educational program at the New Harmony Utopian Society.
3. To examine the vocational education program at the New Harmony Utopian Society.
4. To draw implications for contemporary vocational education from the experiences at the New Harmony Utopian Society.

Methods of Information Collection

Information was collected using both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included the New Harmony Gazette, books written by prominent leaders and educators who participated in New Harmony, and diaries written by residents and visitors to New Harmony. Secondary sources included biographies of leaders, journal articles, and a master's thesis. Information was also collected during five personal visits to the town of New Harmony by the author. Sources were examined for both internal and external criticism.

Background of New Harmony

In 1815 George Rapp led a group of 800 German immigrant followers from Pennsylvania down the Ohio River to a tract of land just above the mouth of the Wabash River in southwestern Indiana to a tract of land named Harmonie (Tyler, 1944). The Harmonie society was based upon a Lutheran religious conviction and Father Rapp served as a virtual dictator over all phases of the lives of Harmonists.

In accordance with their religious tenets a modest educational program was established at Harmonie. The vocational phase consisted primarily of an apprenticeship program. This formal education ended at age 14. At that age each teenager was apprenticed to a skilled tradesman (Pitzer & Elliott, 1979).

In 1824 the Rappites decided to move back to Pennsylvania. They recognized the need to find closer markets for their goods; they were not very popular with their Indiana neighbors; and the environment was considered too warm and not too healthful (Duss, 1943).

So, in 1825 Harmonie was sold to Robert Owen of Scotland who renamed it New Harmony. Owen paid George Rapp $120,000 for 25,000

acres of land, several buildings, a herd of cattle, and a flock of sheep (Pelham, Bernhard, & Duclos, 1975). Joined by a partner, William Maclure, Owen had visions of establishing an innovative, utopian social structure. The opposite of George Rapp in many important ways, Owen and Maclure were liberal while Rapp was conservative; they believed in social change without a religious base (Lockwood, 1907); they also used education as a central change agent (Elliott, 1933), while Rapp viewed education as a relatively small part of his society (Pitzer & Elliott, 1979). Owners of New Harmony greatly influenced the philosophy of the utopian society, as well as its day to day operation.

Robert Owen grew up in an industrial society that emphasized class discrimination and child labor (Podmore, 1924). He had little time or opportunity for education. In 1800 he became the owner of a large cotton mill in New Lanark, Scotland. He found what was described as deplorable conditions for the mill workers (Podmore, 1924). He observed intemperence, superstitions, illiteracy, theft (to the extent that the previous owner's property was almost considered public property), and immorality (Owen, 1857). Owen set about improving the lot of the mill workers in several ways. One way was to run general stores where workers could get good quality supplies at reasonable prices (Owen, 1857). Another was to use better and safer equipment at the mill (Owen, 1857). Perhaps the most significant was the establishment of schools for the children of the mill workers.

In order to avoid the bad image of a pauper school, Owen charged a token fee for children to attend his school (Owen, 1857). The school for children of one year to 12 years of age, emphasized pleasurable activities such as singing and drawing (Podmore, 1924). Both

punishment and textbooks were discouraged; natural objects were substituted for the latter (Podmore, 1924). Owen, of course, had a more businesslike reason for encouraging children to attend his school. That reason was to encourage the mothers of young children to leave their homes and to work at the cotton mill (Butt, 1971).

In 1818 Owen made a trip to Yverdun, Switzerland to visit Pestalozzi and his school. Owen described the experience in less than monumental terms (Owen, 1857): "He was doing, he said all he could to cultivate the heart, the head, and the hands of his pupils. His theory was good, but his means and experience were very limited, and his principles were those of the old system" (p. 177). Owen was more impressed with a former partner of Pestalozzi's named M. de Fellenburg. The favorable impression was so great that Owen enrolled his two sons Robert Dale and William in M. de Fellenburg's school (Owen, 1857).

It was this background of benevolence toward working class people and humanistic education influenced directly and indirectly by Pestalozzi that Robert Owen brought to New Harmony. His partner, William Maclure, had similar interests. Both would have to be considered socially progressive, especially for the 1820s.

As an adult William Maclure was wealthy, developed a keen interest and a favorable reputation in geology and science, and had developed a great deal of interest in America. He was most displeased with the education he had received as a child (Bestor, 1950).

While visiting in Switzerland he accidentally came upon Pestalozzi's school at Yverdun. His first visit was in 1805 (Cole, 1953). Maclure made at least six additional visits to Pestalozzi's school and became fascinated with that system of education. In fact,

Maclure spent a rather large sum of his own money to transport a disciple of Pestalozzi's, Joseph Neef (a native of France), to travel to the United States, learn English, and establish a Pestalozzian type school in Philadelphia.

It was in Philadelphia that Maclure and Owen first met. Owen believed society could best be changed with a significant changing of rules. He believed in a cashless and classless society (Elliott, 1933). Maclure believed that education was the way to bring about change. He saw education as playing an even more important role than did Owen (Lockwood, 1907). However, both men had enough philosophical agreement in education to go ahead with the experiment that eventually occurred at New Harmony.

The specifics of what Maclure advocated included schools supported by government (Elliott, 1933). He also believed that products of education could be sold or consumed at the school as a means of significantly subsidizing the school (Elliott, 1933). He placed heavy emphasis on vocational education including training for a variety of crafts and trades (Carmony & Elliott, 1980). The education of adults through libraries was another interest (Carmony & Elliott, 1980).

Both Maclure and Owen believed in a practical education, as emphasized in the Pestalozzian method. They also believed in the Lancasterian method where older student monitors taught other, generally, younger students (Elliott, 1933).

New Harmony Utopian Society

Robert Owen was most anxious to get his utopian society started. He was impatient and overly optimistic. In 1825 while in Washington, D.C., he gave a lengthy two-day speech with John Quincy Adams and James

Monroe in the audience. There, he enthusiastically explained his concept of New Harmony (Podmore, 1924). He concluded his speech with an invitation to the "Industrious and well-disposed of all nations" to come to New Harmony (Podmore, 1924, p. 291).

Many were excited by Owen's speech and they followed him to New Harmony. Nearly 1,000 strong (Lockwood, 1902) flocked to the "Community of Equality." No discrimination was made as a basis for admission. This lack of discrimination was important because of the philosophy of New Harmony and also because of anxiety over filling the now empty houses and buildings at the society (Cole, 1953). This lack of discrimination would quickly result in serious problems. A motley group assembled when specified laborers were actually needed. William Owen (Robert's son) noted in a letter dated December 16, 1825 that [we need] masons, bricklayers, wheelwrights, carpenters, machine-makers, potters, and above all good cooks and washerwomen and laundresses" (Cole, 1953, p. 153).

New Harmony was administered by a Robert Owen appointed committee eventually enlarged and confirmed by a vote of the community. The entire membership of the society, however, had the right to participate in public deliberations (Bestor, 1950). Owen's communistic beliefs were exemplified by the community store. Each adult was allotted $80 per year by the governing committee (Bestor, 1950). Cash did not exchange hands. Bookkeeping credits and debits were used to keep track of each member's allotments (Bestor, 1950).

The social life at New Harmony was very progressive even while a great deal of dissension was occurring in the society. Among the positive aspects were stimulating lectures and formation of the Female

Social Society. Music and dancing occurred almost nightly, and the New Harmony Gazette newspaper was established (Tyler, 1944).

New Harmony Educational System

It was out of this background that a truly innovative educational system was started. This educational system included a significant amount of vocational education.

The criteria established by Owen and Maclure for the New Harmony educational system included a practical perspective, Pestalozzian influence, public support, and as much self sufficiency as possible. The two owners believed this system could be accomplished by having the best people available to administer and teach at New Harmony. Such a group of educators and other intellectuals came to the society in January 1826. As noted by Wilson (1964) William Maclure arrived on a keelboat

> . . .named The Philanthropist but rechristianed for posterity by Owen as The Boatload of Knowledge, it carried an astonishing intellectual cargo on one of the most hopeful and halting voyages in the history of the Ohio River. Among the boat's passengers were Thomas Say, the American naturalist; Charles Alexandre Lesueur, the French naturalist; Madame Marie Duclos Fretageot, a schoolmistress from Paris via Philadelphia who was a disciple of the Swiss educational reformer, Pestalozzi; Robert Dale Owen, Robert Owen's oldest son, the educator, pioneer champion of birth control, and crusader for women's rights; and a score or more of teachers and pupils for the school system that was to make New Harmony famous in the history of American education. (p. 69)

These educators and intellectuals were joined by Maclure's choice of an educational reformer, Joseph Neef. The latter fit the pre-established criteria for the educational system and influenced it as much or more than the others.

School Organization

There were three basic organizational levels for school children. The belief of the community was that children became the property of the society at age two (Lockwood, 1907). The infant school was for children ages two to five, the higher school was for children ages five to 12, and the school for adults was for students over age 12 (Gutek, 1978).

The Infant School

The infant school contained over 100 students taught by Mrs. Neef and Madame Fretageot (Lockwood, 1907). The teachers' major responsibilities were to entertain the infants, teach various games, and in general, to conduct school similar to a modern day kindergarten (Lockwood, 1907). The children did not live at home with their parents. They stayed at the school, thus driving out unsatisfactory home and parental influences as quickly as possible (Elliott, 1933). The infant school was conducted in building No. 2 at New Harmony. The older children, commenting on disciplinary measures at the school and not being permitted to see their parents made up the following poem (Gutek, 1978):

> Number 2 pigs locked up in a pen,
> When they get out, its now and then;
> When they get out, they sneak about,
> For fear old Neef will find them out. (p. 55)

The Higher School

At age 5 children advanced from the infant school to the higher school. Joseph Neef served as principal of this school, while five of his children served as teachers. Enrollment reached a peak of about 200 students (Carmony & Elliott, 1980).

The higher school was the best example of Pestalozzian influence (Elliott, 1933). Each student was expected to learn a useful trade. Just as with the students in the infant school, the higher school students seldom saw their parents and slept in rooms above their workshops (Elliott, 1933).

Joseph Neef led military exercises as the boys went to labor in the field and in the garden. The girls followed different trades from the boys, learning instead "female employments" (Pelham, Bernhard, & Duclos, 1975).

The Adult School

The School of Adults was the third division of instruction in the society and for citizens over 12 years old (Elliott, 1933). Most of its courses were taught in the evening and consisted mainly of lectures in chemistry, on drawing, on natural history, and on experimental farming.

The adult school emphasized the society's belief that education was a lifelong process. The basic purpose of the adult school was to continue the residents' general and vocational education while they served as productive members of the community (Carmony & Elliott, 1980). The adult school's enrollment reached about 80 (Carmony & Elliott, 1980).

The Emphasis On Vocational Education

The philosophy and the economic needs of New Harmony made it logical that vocational education would be emphasized. The Pestalozzian-influenced educational system emphasized natural learning. For example, chemistry could be taught in the home economics kitchen (Neef, 1969). Basic organizational skills could be taught through

tailoring by cutting cloth into ". . .small, middling, and large pieces; and lastly they set all those pieces in order and form the contemplated coat" (Neef, 1969, p. 61). The emphasis on natural learning and hands on experiences gradually evolved into what many today would call vocational education.

In addition to the Pestalozzian-influenced educational system, economic necessity also made it logical for the New Harmony schools to turn to vocational education. As Tyler (1944) noted there was a great lack of skilled workers at New Harmony. Robert Owen's overzealous sales techniques had attracted a lot of residents with few practical skills. The original goal had been to operate all of the Rappite industries and use their products as a source of income to the society. The sawmill, the grist mill, the hat shop, and the boot shop were all successful (Tyler, 1944). However, the dyeworks, the pottery, and the cotton and woolen mills were all idle (Tyler, 1944). In fact, it became necessary after a time to limit new membership to masons, carpenters, bricklayers, cooks, and laundresses (Tyler, 1944).

In the late eighteenth century New Harmony could have turned to an apprenticeship system as a means for developing skilled labor. However, by the early 1800s apprenticeship training had fallen into decline in the United States (Roberts, 1965). Much of the decline occurred because of abuses associated with the system. By 1826 the American industrial revolution was creating demand for a more skilled labor force at the same time apprenticeship training was declining. New Harmony represented a microcosm of the same problem, but proposed a creative solution which would be later known as vocational education. In addition, as social progressives, Robert Owen and William Maclure

would have had philosophical difficulties supporting the apprenticeship system. They would have abhored the notion that some people were made to fulfill lesser positions in society and not live up to their full potential.

Another economic consideration was the possibility that schools could become economically self-supporting. Maclure was a strong advocate of such a possibility. "As the students learned trades, the income derived from the sale of their products could be used to support the school" (Gutek, 1978, p. 47). Gutek (1978) also noted that both Pestalozzi and Neef had used methods resembling vocational education earlier in their careers. Pestalozzi successfully combined agriculture, spinning, and basic education at Neuhof. Neef had exposed students at his Philadelphia school to occupations, but had not used vocational instruction until his teaching experience at New Harmony.

Examples of Vocational Education

The New Harmony Gazette (1826) noted an example of vocational education incorporating both the Pestalozzian and economic influences:

> The boys learn at least one mechanical art; for instance, to set types and print; and for this purpose there is a printing press in each school, by aid of which are published all their elementary books, all of which are constructed upon the contrary principles from those of the old school: viz. taking the most direct and easiest road to arrive at the end proposed, in place of the circuitious metaphysical method adopted by the old system, as if teachers were afraid of giving knowledge too cheap. By setting types they practice accurate spelling, and became familiar with the construction of all languages which they can earn their bread in case of necessity. It is also a great source of economy to the school, and answers all the purposes of a recreation from more difficult studies. (p. 167)

Another vocational example was taught through the practice of gardening (Neef, 1969). Students learning to be gardeners observed ". . .different modes of reproduction, the birth, growth, maturity, and duration of life, the diseases and death of vegetables, . . . inexhaustible materials for investigation" (p. 89).

Numerous examples were identified from both primary and secondary sources showing the influence of vocational education at New Harmony. Pelham, Bernhard, and Duclos (1975) noted that the pupils assisted with kitchen work which included cooking vegetables, stirring mush, and washing dishes as well as doing farm work such as milking cows and attending to horses and other stock. Pelham, Bernhard, and Duclos (1975) also noted that copper plate engraving was taught in the schools. The New Harmony Gazette (1826) noted that all students were taught lithography. In another 1826 issue the New Harmony Gazette it was stated that male students acquired a knowledge of gardening, of agriculture, and of surveying. Girls were also taught vocational skills, but in much different areas, mainly the domestic operations requisite for a community.

Several different vocational courses were taught at the higher school (Elliott 1933). Among them were taxidermy, printing, engraving, drawing, carpentry, wheel-wrighting, woodturning, blacksmithing, cabinet-working, hat-working, shoemaking, agriculture, washing, cooking, sewing, housekeeping, dressmaking, and millinery.

Lockwood (1907) used a description from a student at New Harmony to illustrate that girls, as well as boys were taught vocational skills. One female described that at rising in the morning she and a detail of girls were sent to the dairy barn where they

learned the skill of milking cows ". . . and this milk, with mush cooked in large kettles, constituted the essential part of the morning meal, which the children were expected to finish in fifteen minutes." (p. 246) Both boys and girls were expected to choose at least one trade or occupation and when a child could not make up his or her mind, the management assigned a trade. When one trade was mastered, the student could learn a second one. Pelham, Bernhard, and Duclos (1975) noted that students would frequently begin their school day at the early hour of 3:00 am and study until 8:00 am, the afternoon would be from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm with the remainder of the mornings and afternoons being spent on working at various trades.

Demise of New Harmony

The open door policy for admission, dissension among the leaders, hard economic times for the society, and a general lack of organization all worked together to spell doom for New Harmony. The society lasted approximately three years, 1825-27, with the educational system lasting approximately two years.

It is difficult to establish a precise date for the dissolution of New Harmony. Several offshoots with such names as Yellow Springs and Macluria were started by New Harmony residents (Tyler, 1944). For practical purposes, New Harmony as envisioned by Robert Owen failed to exist past the year 1827.

In a farewell speech delivered to the society residents in May of 1827, Robert Owen tried to be optimistic, but noted serious problems. He noted residents whose minds were too limited to grasp change, he noted a potential inability to have the society totally support

schools, and admonished the residents to be in "harmony" again upon return from a European trip (Ennis, 1977).

In addition to a major break in the partnership between Maclure and Owen, there was also dissension between the leading educators. Madame Fretageot established her own school system going beyond the infant school originally in her charge, and taking students away from Joseph Neef by offering schooling for students of all ages (Maclure & Fretageot, 1948, p. 375).

Implications and Discussion

The publicly supported vocational education program at New Harmony provides evidence that vocational educators must look to a year much earlier than 1917 to begin the history of their field. By establishing a practical school-based alternative to the apprenticeship program, New Harmony helped to legitimize vocational education. However, the importance of New Harmony goes beyond being the first publicly supported vocational education program in the United States. It transplanted the Pestalozzian method of instruction which used natural objects instead of textbooks and was an early example of use of the learning by doing concept. New Harmony's vocational education program came about as the result of work by men who believed that all people, if given an opportunity could lead constructive lives and contribute to the efforts of the group. This idea would later be emulated by such social progressives as Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt in the early 1900s and John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s. As a politically astute individual, Robert Owen sought to impress two presidents with his ideas. Twentieth century vocational education supporters followed his example when they sought the support of the

four presidents named above. New Harmony has additional implications for three major contemporary issues in the field of vocational education, namely sex equity, comprehensive high school versus vocational school, and teaching academics through vocational education.

Sex Equity

New Harmony showed that it was possible for both males and females to develop vocational skills. Mainly through the efforts of Robert Owen, an egalitarian attitude was pervasive throughout the educational system, creating a "free, equal, and universal" school (Lockwood, 1907, p. 4). By today's standards, of course, sex stereotyping occured in much of the specific occuaptional selections. For instance, women were not necessarily excluded from an occupational area but they were encouraged through words and actions to go the ways of their female colleagues, usually toward homemaking skills. Today, these same attitudes often prevent students, girls and boys, from pursuing careers nontraditional for their sex (Burge & Hillison, 1985). Unfortunately, New Harmony's demise occurred before a crossing of sex barriers could be initiated.

Comprehensive School Versus Vocational School

Contemporary vocational educators frequently discuss the merits and problems of offering their program in a comprehensive school setting or in a vocational school setting. New Harmony started with a comprehensive school setting, where the majority of vocational programs are offered today. Such a beginning showed others that both academic education and vocational education could operate effectively in the same environment and did not have to be separated.

Teaching Academics Through Vocational Education

Certain critics of contemporary vocational education say that more emphasis should be placed on the basics of the three Rs. Vocational educators can note that the basics have been an important part of the vocational curriculum since 1826. New Harmony can be used as an example of teaching and applying the basics in a most practical manner.

Summary

The New Harmony utopian society established many precedents from a social and educational perspective. None of these precedents were more dramatic nor more significant than its contribution to the field of vocational education. New Harmony followed the social progressiveness of its founders. For the 1820s it was too extreme a stand and proved to be short-lived. However, important precedent-setting ground was broken. It would be almost a century later before a larger progressive era would result in a national recognition for the merit of vocational education.

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